

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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1. Soviet personnel are permitted to serve on ships sailing in foreign waters only after very thorough checking. Normally, it takes six months before permission is granted. It is particularly difficult for non-Russian sailors, such as Latvians, Estonians, and others, to receive such permission. Only about 20 Estonians sail on ships that visit foreign ports, and these sailors must leave hostages at home.
2. Merchant seamen who have been in the service for years are now in the coastal trade or work ashore, where the pay, in comparison with seagoing trade, is low. Some ships are used as training or "crew-checking" ships, to which young sailors are sent. Before joining such ships, the young seamen are given seaman and stoker courses. Most of these sailors belong to the Communist Party. The Politruks of these ships are usually first officers. These training ships sail to foreign ports and conduct normal trade. At the end of a day's work, in every port, a meeting is held for the crew. In a foreign port, no one is allowed to go ashore alone. It is also forbidden to visit public houses, movies, theaters, and restaurants which are not approved by the Soviet authorities.
3. Three or four years ago, it was difficult for seamen on board a Soviet ship to obtain shore leave while in a Western port; since then, it has become easier. Now it is comparatively easy to obtain shore leave for a short period of time. At present, sailors are permitted to go ashore within the dock area without asking permission, provided they stay ashore only a short time, approximately an hour.

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4. Desertion from a ship in a foreign port is not difficult, but relatives at home are punished. When going ashore abroad, sailors have to go in groups of three. This is in order to avoid defection, because the other two in the company are responsible for the third man. The Politruk of the ship is held answerable for desertions, and there are cases where the Politruks of ships, from which seamen deserted, were sentenced to from five to ten years in prison. When a seaman drinks in harbor or speaks to a foreigner, he is punished. However, a seaman can buy a bottle of liquor, but he may not drink it in a restaurant. For the first offense, a seaman is forbidden to sail in any foreign waters for six months, and during this time he receives only seventy-five per cent of his pay. After the second offense, he is forbidden to sail in foreign waters entirely.
5. Pay is higher for overseas service, and a part of it is paid in foreign currency. With this foreign money, a sailor can buy anything he needs, but he must show the receipts, the details of which are entered in a book. If the purchases do not exceed the foreign currency allowance, they may all be taken home. On embarking there is no search, but on entering the home port, apart from the crew being questioned, a very thorough search is conducted; for example, even ties are opened up. Foreign newspapers, books, and other articles of possible propaganda are especially sought. Cigarettes and liquor are also forbidden.
6. When abroad, Soviet sailors are not permitted to receive mail, nor are they allowed to write letters. Any letters they wrote would have to be done clandestinely.
7. On return to the Soviet Union after a trip to the West, all seamen are screened. The screening is not severe; it consists of only a few questions, but it is possible that a seaman, who had violated some regulation, could be tripped up by these questions.

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